

Sunday, Sept. 13, 2008: 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: The Rev. Deacon Marcia Tyriver  
Proverbs 1:20-33, Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-8:1, James 3:1-12, Mark 8:27-38

Jesus asked his disciples..."who do **you** say that I am?",

and Peter had the **correct** answer: "You are the Messiah". (Mark 8:29)

But why, then, did Jesus "**sternly (order)**...them not to tell anyone about him"?

It's true that Jesus said this at **various** times in his ministry because he wanted to maintain a low profile for awhile longer.

He knew his words and miracles would become notorious and he'd

be martyred because his actions and words countered the people in **power**. They challenged the people of **privilege**. ..the government, the important people of the temples, the adults, the men, the socially respectable, and those who amassed wealth by greed.

But there's a deeper and different meaning to Jesus's rebuke of Peter.

When Peter called him "the Messiah", it triggered the connotation of a charismatic political leader. Jewish culture greatly anticipated such a person ...someone to lead them as a "winning team" over the Roman oppression...someone who would excite and incite the masses of people into a successful political movement.

This image of a popular vote-getter and crowd-pleasing hero was **not** Jesus's divine role.

Instead, he knew his divine role was much deeper and completely different.

In fact, the very next thing Jesus does in today's gospel is to tell his disciples that he **must** suffer and be killed.

Why would he allow this?

Because he came to earth to teach, show, and give us a way of revolutionary love and life.

**This** Way was counter to our primordial instinct of pure self-interest...counter to the instinct to want advantage and power over other people...counter to our instinct to want to be part of the "top dog" group. Counter to herd-mentality.

He knew he needed to stand apart from political games...and apart from envious people who would eventually arrest him and try to engage him in their power-struggle ...in their game of accusing him of being a criminal for defying "the system".

But this suffering and martyrdom were not Peter's idea of a Messiah.

No wonder Peter rebuked Jesus for saying this was to happen.

It wasn't part of the cultural expectation. Nor was it part of Peter's dream of success for their whole movement.

**And**, no wonder Jesus, in turn, rebuked **Peter** so strongly for trying to dissuade him.

No wonder he called Peter **Satan!** "Get behind me, Satan!"(Mark 8:33)

Jesus was dealing with the heart of his purpose for being on earth. ..which was to give us salvation. To connect us with our loving God and save us from ourselves. He did this by loving us so much that he gave his life rather than join the traditional power game. He always stood outside the winner-loser game of the world...outside the world's ego-driven mania ...outside the world's violence.

His suffering and death were yet to be lived-out, and his disciples had no idea what was coming...no idea what his words **really** would mean.

A few years after Christ's life on earth, St. Paul clarified the fact that Jesus was potentially a "stumbling block" to us. He acknowledged that some people called it "foolishness" that Jesus allowed himself to suffer so and be killed...and that they thought it was "weak" on Christ's part. (1 Cor. 1:23) They didn't see the divine in his doing so.

Biblical scholars in the intervening years have even called Christ's choice a "scandal". His love is so radical, his willing self-sacrifice so startling, that it is considered a scandal according to the "regular" way of thinking. The Cross **is** a scandal. Yes, it **is** ...according to the **human** way of thinking.

Even today, following the Way of the Cross is still difficult sometimes. It calls for us to do and say what popular culture often calls foolish or scandalous.

It is hard sometimes to set our mind on things divine, not on human things.

But doing that **is** the key to true life. After all, it's not about us. It's about God.

For example, here are three current situations about which not even Christians agree.

Do you remember in August when the person who caused the explosion of Pan Am Flight 103 was released on compassionate grounds? Following their legal system's tradition to release terminally ill inmates, Scotland released the bomber to die in his native Libya.

Scottish doctors gave him 3 months to live. (Sojourners: SojoMail08.27.09)

What did you think when you first heard this news? Was this a scandal to you? Or was it humane and focusing on the divine?

I'm not talking about the welcome he was given upon his return to Libya.

I'm not talking about any possible political motive for Scotland's advantage.

I'm asking you about compassion...about forgiveness.

Was that reason enough to release the prisoner...because of compassion & forgiveness?

Or was his release on compassionate grounds a scandal to you, as it was to most of the world?

And how about our nation's current health-care debate? Not everyone **has** or can **get** health insurance in our land- of- the- free.

And **some** of our people who **are** able to buy medical insurance, can't go for routine care after buying the expensive insurance. There's not enough money left in their income to pay the co-pay for routine medical attention.

It's likely 50 million American have no medical insurance at the moment.

(<http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=105480>)

It seems this has been all OK with a majority of the people who already have good health insurance. It's evidently OK with the massive health insurance and pharmaceutical industry. Is it OK with you? What's the divine way to look at all this?

In this debate, does our population hear Christ's admonition to "deny yourself & follow me."? (Mark 8:34)

Do we take to heart His second of only 2 commandments "to love your neighbor as yourself"?

Here's what the August author of the Episcopal devotional *Forward Day by Day* said. "True life isn't about saving my skin. It is about living the life of (someone)...whom God in Christ has (**already**) saved. It is about sharing that **salvation** in word and deed with a world in need." (*Forward Day by Day*, p. 32, August 31, 2009)

And let me tell you about an incident we had last month when our peace group was lined-up on Milton Avenue. We were holding signs saying "Wage peace, not war". But one young truck-driver, incensed by this, accelerated his truck and

deliberately swerved towards us, almost jumped the curb & almost hit us, missing us by only 3 inches...swerved back, and sped away. Almost a hit and run.

And I thought to myself, "Satan, get away from this young man. Leave him.

Lord, let him speed away from the evil of his anger and hatred and leave **Satan** behind him in the dust....not us peace workers.

Let him turn his thoughts to things divine instead....to thoughts of the sanctity of all life. Clear his heart of hatred. Clear his heart of anger...anger which is so like that of the mob which killed Christ. "

Is it scandalous to you that some of us are for peaceful tactics as an option to war?

Is the hope of health insurance for everyone in the US foolishness to you?

Is the Scottish government's release of a terminally ill criminal on compassionate grounds scandalous to you?

At the end of today's gospel, Christ spoke of **shame**...of some people being ashamed of Him. Where **is** the shame in these three situations?

Do you put shame on the government of Scotland... or not?

Do you put shame on our nation's allowing inequitable and unavailable medical insurance coverage ...any shame on the medical insurance and pharmaceutical companies' massive, greedy profit at others' expense...and on their powerful lobbying?

Do you put shame on us peace workers...or not? If you do, why?

Quoting today's lectionary from the "Wisdom of Solomon", I close with the prayer, Give us the Wisdom, O Lord, to "order (these)... things well. " Amen.

(Wisdom of Solomon 8:1)